DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 913 CG 022 427

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TITLE Delivery of Rehabilitation Services to Blacks Who are Disabled.
PUB DATE Sep 89
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Rehabilitation Association (Orlando, FL, September 6-10, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; *Client Characteristics (Human Services); *Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Attitudes; Delivery Systems; *Disabilities; Racial Differences; *Rehabilitation Counseling

ABSTRACT

Being black and disabled are characteristics which are frequently rejected by the larger society. When counselors and black disabled clients come together, they usually bring different life experiences because of physical abilities and race. There may be more similarities if both the client and counselor are disabled or both are of the same race. When counselors encounter clients who are different, they are confronted with obstacles which may be referred to as dispositional and situational variables. Dispositional barriers refer to personal feelings, attitudes, and self-perceptions which counselors and clients have. Situational barriers are relevant to personal circumstances. The last barrier concerns human relations skills; according to previous reearch deceptive and defensive techniques are used by blacks, indicating that blacks have strong fears of failure and fear of expressing genuine emotions. These techniques prevent others from removing social barriers. When working with these clients, counselors should demonstrate: (1) unconditional positive regard; (2) enabling characteristics; (3) knowledge of jargon used by blacks, discriminatory practices, and community resources; (4) interest in clients' progress; (5) acceptance of the client; (6) congruence between verbal and non-verbal communication; (7) openness; and (8) altruism. Finally, counselors should be humble in their omnipotence. (ABL)

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Delivery of Rehabilitation Services to Blacks Who are Disabled

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In the movie, "These Are Good People," a white paraplegic talks about being disabled and how he is making the most of his situation; he pauses and asks the question "I wonder what it's like to be black and disabled?" His questions mirrors what Beatrice Wright observed in the 60's and that is, that minorities and disabled persons are restricted because of society's prejudicial attitudes; racial minorities and persons with disabilities are generally devalued, both groups experience restrictions (employment, housing, recreations, etc. Given such an attitude, it is no wonder that the white paraplegic pondered the situation of a black who is also disabled. Does being black and disabled result in a double handicap? Gliedman and Roth (1980) called persons with disabilities, the "unexpected minority." They compared the isolation and discrimination experienced by the disabled with blacks and other minorities. Literature also refers to the low status that society gives to blacks. Barnes said that society places a negative value upon blackness which makes it difficult for blacks to develop positive self concepts or to have satisfying experiences. With these thoughts in mind, I decided to survey blacks with disabilities and get a letter idea about how they feel about their different experiences; i.e., family, school, human services, employment, and feelings about self

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The study showed that

- Black with disabilities have positive relationships with family members. This finding leads to the concept of a supportive black family; a resource for the rehabilitation process.
- Only a small percentage of the disabled found school experiences and peer interactions enjoyable. (isolation and not really mainstreamed)

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- Blacks with visible and non-visible disabilities, saw their disability, not race, being a barrier to employment
- Blacks with disabilities reported satisfaction with self, found it easy to get along with others, to make friends and to be comfortable with others.
- Least favorable responses were in areas of human services. Less than half felt that they had positive interaction with service providers, had been given information about all available services, or received all services for which they were eligible.

When comparing the same experiences of black disabled students and white disabled students, the study in 1987 revealed

- Both groups repeated a class relationship with family members
- White students had more satisfactory school experiences. White students had better experience with school counselors (more open and honest) than blacks.
- More black disabled students felt that they would not be hired because of disability than because of race. Whites also saw disability as a reason for not being hired. More blacks felt that co-workers would be affected by both their race and disability than whites. A majority of both groups felt that they would be accepted because of their personality. Both groups placed less emphasis upon arch barriers than expected. P. 74
- The black group had a higher percentage of respondents who reported satisfied with self than the white group.

- Both white and blacks were some what negative about services provided to them. Both groups felt that they had less than a positive interaction with human services providers. White students were more positive than black students regarding openness and honesty of providers. More whites than blacks felt that they were treated worthy by providers.

Given the above background, I want to focus upon the interaction between blacks who are disabled and rehabilitation counselors.

When counselors/advisors and black disabled clients come together, they usually bring different life experiences. Different because of physical abilities and race. However, there may be more similarities if both the client and counselor are disabled or both are of the same race. More often than not the counselor is white, without disability and have values which are perceived to be different than the black client. Occasionally, the counselor is black and disabled. Although they may have more in common, the black client is likely to think of the black counselor as being one of the lucky ones. The client is also likely to think that the black disabled counselor has forgotten or has never known what is is like to encounter barriers because of race and/or disability.

Black clients who are disabled may be confronted with two sets of stereotypes. They may be thought of as lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy, unintelligent, and happy. As disabled persons, the clients may be thought of as being frustrated, maladjusted, and to have very tragic lives. As stated earlier, being black or disabled are characteristics which are frequently rejected by the larger society.

What happens when counselors, who usually represent the ideal, encounter clients who are different? Often, they are confronted with obstacles caused by personal feelings and

previous experiences. These obstacles can be broadly referred to as dispositional and situational barriers. Dispositional barriers refer to personal feelings, attitudes and self-perceptions which counselors and clients have. Situational barriers are relevant to personal circumstances.

Previous work with black disabled clients and counselors as well as observations by Anderson and Smith (1969), and Karnes, Zehrbach and Jones (1971), indicate that both groups are predisposed to dispositional barriers of fear, alienation, feelings about self and value orientation. Black disabled clients and counselors intellectualize their feelings in several ways. Clients are likely to have fears of:

- self disclosure

  Can I trust the counseling staff? Will I be viewed as too passive or too aggressive? Will seeking services emphasize my disability more than my abilities?

- loss of power over self

  Will I lose control over my personal experience? Will they manipulate or exploit me to make the agency/office look good? Will they give any consideration to my wants?

- being lied to

  Will they only raise my hopes? Promise me assistance which will not be forthcoming? Will they lie by omission, i.e., not inform me of all the services for which I am eligible?

- experiencing alienation

  I will feel alienated because the situation is strange. I never planned to receive services. I don't know how to act, I can't look them in the eyes. I know they think I am lazy, dumb and uncooperative. Do I really want to feel alienated?

- failure

  My life has been one failure after another. I will not attempt to succeed, because I am simply going to fail again.

Counselors may have fears of:

- resentment

  Will the client resent me because of negative experiences with professionals? Or will the client resent me because of my position of power? After all, the client must do as I say. Maybe the client blames me for all of the problems blacks have had. The client may resent me because I am not disabled or the client will resent me simply because of my race.

- being discovered

  Blacks and people with disabilities are adept at recognizing phonies. The client probably knows this is my first job. Knows that I've never worked with this group of people before. The client may tell me that I don't know what I'm doing.

- being manipulated

  The client is agency wise. The client knows I am on a guilt trip. Will he/she use this knowledge to con me into making promises or delivering services I am not supposed to?

Another dispositional barrier concerns feelings about self.

Black disabled clients may think:

To be disabled is to be physically deviant. Society looks down on deviancy. Additionally most people don't think much of blacks. Therefore, I cannot imagine that I will be treated as a person of worth. Besides, what are my chances of making this experience a positive one? Every time I try to improve myself they knock me down. All my life,

they've tried to make me feel bad about myself. All of my failures are due to external forces. So why let them try again to make me feel bad about myself. I am not their ideal. Besides, seeking assistance puts me in conflict with my family and friends. My parents have been hurt by the system. They stopped trying to get help for me, because we were treated so badly. My family doesn't want you to kick me again.

Counselors are likely to think:

I have achieved because I am intelligent, creative, young, able bodied. I am successful. I am society's ideal. I am somebody. I am important, I am respected. Even if I were disabled, I would be better off than a black who is disabled. It must be awful to be black and disabled.

Then, there is the question of values.

The client thinks, my values are the same as yours. I want success, security, health, love and happiness. The difference is I have to spend most of my time trying to satisfy my immediate needs. I don't have time for long-range goals. To work toward future goals is to forget my family's hidden curriculum which is to survive and take care of basic needs first. Besides, I must be realistic. Chances of realizing my occupational aspirations are not as great as yours.

Counselors may think:

I must treat black disabled clients differently because our values are not the same. They only live for today without concern for the future. The clients really don't value education, but prefer to have a good time. Black disabled clients don't care about work ethics.

Combining factors of cultural differences, value orientations and communication factors, the rehabilitation counselor and the black disabled client are confronted with significant

barriers. Lets look at how these factors are operationalized in a counseling interview session.

When considering situational barriers, primary concern is given to communication styles which result from circumstances unique to blackness. Environment and situations may have caused blacks to develop a way of communicating which prevents outsiders from removing social barriers. In 1969, Anderson noted that the vocabulary which is employed by blacks is not unlike vocabularies used by special professional groups. For example, both groups use terms which assist them in communicating effectively with peers. Computer programmers have a language which is foreign to the average person. Blacks often use language which is easily understood by each other. "Bad" is good, ""gig" is job, "show boating" is being stylish, etc. Anderson further observes that special language is often used to "put down" or "put on" outsiders. The language is used with each other as an expression of identification, of comraderie. The special language is difficult for others to learn because when "outsiders" learn it, "insiders" change it. Occasionally counselors succeed in being genuine in the use of special language. But as a rule, that practice should be avoided. It is probably better to learn the meanings in order to understand what is being said than to try to use the language.

Black-White Language Comparison*
Content (what you talk about)

Black-Black

- white people and their racist attitudes
- coming social events, parties, concerts, music
- past social events
- mutual friends and . . . romantic activities, gossip
- clothing, planned trips, purchases
- making money, hustling, job opportunities
- being black in America

Black-White

- weather
- school or work
- mutual acquaintances
- sports
- the news, politics, current events
- activities of interest to whites (flower gardening, beer parties, fishing)
- rarely about social events, unless work-related

Style (how you talk about it)

Black-Black

- use of slang
- usually lots of laughter
- in-grouping gestures, palm slapping louder than usual
- black English (violation of grammar)
- assumed intimacy

Black-White

- somewhat restrained
- little or occasional slang
- awareness of grammar
- no touching

Function (why you talk about it)

Black-Black

- relaxation
- mutual interest
- become better acquainted or maintain friendship

Black-White

- to get or maintain a position
- to be seen as capable of getting along
- to be seen favorably for reasons of future promotions or improvement in position (good grade)
- to not be seen as different
- mutual interest
- obtain or keep business connection

Note. From Assertive Black . . . Puzzled White, by Donald Cheek, 1976, p. 54.

Cheek also observed that blacks are very sensitive to non-verbal messages. Many disabled clients have also discussed their ability to accurately analyze non-verbal expressions. Both the spoken and unspoken messages are received. Sometimes both messages are responded to, other times only the spoken one.

The last barrier to be considered concerns human relation skills. Again, circumstances have dictated development of a special method of interaction between "insiders and outsiders." According to Anderson (1969), deceptive and defensive techniques are used by blacks who have strong fears of failure and fear of expressing genuine emotions. These techniques prevent others from removing social barriers. Black students may manifest deception and defensiveness by

being passive, aggressive, or playing stupid in order to frustrate the professional. The following chart indicates the differences which can occur between black-black and black-white interaction.

Comparison of
Black-White and Black-Black Interaction*

Black-White Interaction	Black-Black Interaction
1. Black will refer to racial *differences* and use terms of potential threat to whites	1. Black will refer to racial *similarity* and use terms like "brother" and "sister" that soften assertiveness.
2. Blacks will occasionally "revert" to black language and *intimidate*	2. Blacks will occasionally "revert" to black language and introduce *humor*
3. Blacks will be sensitive to looking for any *inequality* that may exist between self and whites	3. Blacks will be sensitive to looking for any *common ground* that exists between self and black person
4. Blacks will attribute *greater harm* and survival threat to an interaction that ends negatively	4. Blacks will attribute *little harm* or survival threat to a misunderstanding.
5. Blacks will be perceived as sounding and and behaving aggressively more often	5. Blacks will involve a language and style that may seem hostile and aggressive to an outsider
6. Loud voice and mannerism will be interpreted as aggressive and inappropriate	6. Loud voice and mannerism will be interpreted as normal and appropriate
7. Threat in aggressive situation is to call into action social and governmental forces	7. Threat in aggressive situation is to apply black community pressure and ostracism.

Note.* From Assertive Black...Puzzled White, by Donald K. Cheek, 1976, p.60.

Now that specific obstacles have been identified, what can be done to remove them? After all, you, counselors/advisors, are open, accepting, enabling, caring, self-revealing, altruistic, knowledgeable about resources and different techniques, and you have unconditional positive regard for all students. What else can you do when working with persons whose repeated failures have resulted in their having overwhelming feelings of low self-esteem, alienation, powerlessness, fatalism and resignation? Following are specific behaviors counselors/advisors should demonstrate if they want to convince others that they possess the above traits.

The counselor/advisor should demonstrate:

- unconditional positive regard by providing opportunities for black disabled students to realize that they are valuable members of society. Counselors should become aware of the ways society benefits from presence of Blacks.
- enabling characteristics by (1) divesting their power. Share information with clients. Instead of opening the door to opportunity, give clients the knowledge, skill, and support to open the door for themselves; (2) promoting positive contacts between black disabled clients and other members of the community; (3) helping students to establish realistic goals which will permit them to experience success; and (4) allowing to develop their own strategies for service delivery.
- knowledge of (1) unique jargon used by blacks, not by using the language, but by understanding the meaning of the words; (2) acknowledge discriminatory practices which black disabled clients may have encountered. However, you should not assume responsibility for past discriminatory practices. You are accountable for your behavior and should work diligently to eliminate negative feelings because of racial differences; (3) community resources and willingness to learn about additional services and programs for students. For example, a black civic or social organization may provide the student with needed financial or transportation assistance.
- caring by being aware and/or interested in their progress. A simple telephone call to inquire about progress in selecting a personal attendant makes them feel that you care. Or, complimenting them for a special accomplishment.
- acceptance of the client as an individual who has abilities, limitations and values which may be similar or dissimilar to yours. The counselor/advisor should not be influenced by stereotypes of blacks or disabled. In particular, counselors/advisors should recognize and

respect the role religion plays in helping black disabled students to handle problems. Many may feel that whatever happens to them is God's will. Or, that God will make a way. The counselors/advisors should encourage the students to help God by helping themselves.

- genuineness by having congruence between your verbal and non-verbal communication. It is difficult for students to believe that they may take all the time they need to tell you what's on their minds, when you are furtively watching the clock.
- self-revealing traits and openness by sharing feelings of fear, insecurity, rejection and happiness with students. Many of you have been fearful of being rejected for employment. Such disclosures will make students consider reasons other than race and disability for their problems.
- altruism by having more concern about what benefits others than about personal recognition. For example, it should be more important to increase the awareness of University and staff about the concerns of black disabled students than to receive accolades.

Finally, counselors/advisors should be humble in their omnipotence. You are not, nor is it likely that you can be all things to all people. You do not have all the answers and you do make mistakes.

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